

Tenth Week in Ordinary Time

Monday 8st June



First reading

1 Kings 17:1-6

The Lord sends Elijah into the wilderness

Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, 'As the Lord lives, the God of Israel whom I serve, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years except at my order.'

The word of the Lord came to him, 'Go away from here, go eastwards, and hide yourself in the wadi Cherith which lies east of Jordan. You can drink from the stream, and I have ordered the ravens to bring you food there.' He did as the Lord had said; he went and stayed in the wadi Cherith which lies east of Jordan. The ravens brought him bread in the morning and meat in the evening, and he quenched his thirst at the stream.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 120(121)

Gospel Acclamation

cf. 2Th2:14

Alleluia, alleluia!

Through the Good News God called us
to share the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Alleluia!

Gospel

Matthew 5:1-12

How happy are the poor in spirit

Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up the hill. There he sat down and was joined by his disciples. Then he began to speak. This is what he taught them:

‘How happy are the poor in spirit;
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Happy the gentle:
they shall have the earth for their heritage.

Happy those who mourn:
they shall be comforted.

Happy those who hunger and thirst for what is right:
they shall be satisfied.

Happy the merciful:
they shall have mercy shown them.

Happy the pure in heart:
they shall see God.

Happy the peacemakers:
they shall be called sons of God.

Happy those who are persecuted in the cause of right:
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

‘Happy are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven: this is how they persecuted the prophets before you.’

Fr Tim’s Reflection

As we get back into Ordinary Time, there is a jump in both the first reading and the gospel. In the first reading we leave the letters of St Paul, and find ourselves in the Old Testament. Readings for this week are from the 1st Book of Kings, and we begin the part called the “Elijah cycle”. In the gospel we leave the gospel of Mark behind and jump into Matthew, this week concentrating on his “sermon on the mount”.

By the time Elijah (the name means “my God is Yahweh”) come to be a prophet, King Solomon is dead and his kingdom was divided between Judah in the south (centred around Jerusalem) and Israel in the north (which would have included Nazareth). Led by Jezebel the queen, people were quick to desert the worship of Yahweh and turned to worshipping Baal instead. God chooses Elijah to do something about this situation.

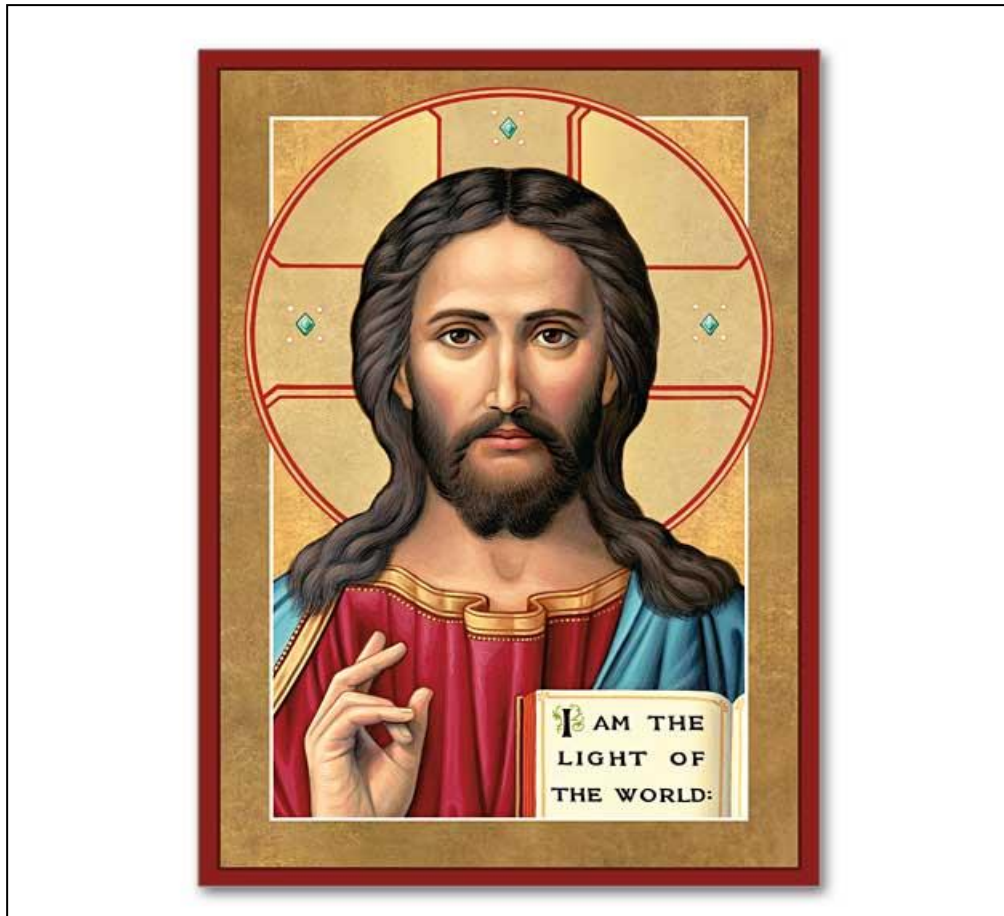
God decides to send a famine on the land and Elijah is the one who has to communicate this unwelcome news to the people. Not surprisingly Elijah has to go into hiding, and for the time being, his needs are supplied by God and the ravens. We will see tomorrow what happens after this.

The gospel of Matthew recounts the beginning of Jesus’ teaching. He has been tempted in the desert, he has called some men to be his followers and now it is time to begin his teaching. A large crowd assembles on a hillside and Jesus teaches them about how they are blessed.

Instead of using the term “blessed” or “happy”, Fr Nick King translates the Greek word *mararios* as “congratulations to”. We see in the beatitudes the ones God esteems. A good opportunity for us today to think about who we think are worthy of such honour. Compare your list with the list Jesus gives. Have a long hard look at your own life: Do you find a place in the list of those Jesus would have congratulated?

Tenth Week in Ordinary Time

Tuesday 9th June



First reading

1 Kings 17:7-16

The widow gives food to Elijah, and is fed

The stream in the place where Elijah lay hidden dried up, for the country had no rain. And then the word of the Lord came to Elijah, 'Up and go to Zarephath, a Sidonian town, and stay there. I have ordered a widow there to give you food.' So he went off to Sidon. And when he reached the city gate, there was a widow gathering sticks; addressing her he said, 'Please bring me a little water in a vessel for me to drink.' She was setting off to bring it when he called after her. 'Please' he said 'bring me a scrap of bread in your hand.' 'As the Lord your God lives,' she replied 'I have no baked bread, but only a handful of meal in a jar and a little oil in a jug; I am just gathering a stick or two to go and prepare this for myself and my son to eat, and then we shall die.' But Elijah said to her, 'Do not be afraid, go and do as you have said; but first make a little scone of it for me and bring it to me, and then make some for yourself and for your son. For thus the Lord speaks, the God of Israel:

"Jar of meal shall not be spent,
jug of oil shall not be emptied,
before the day when the Lord sends
rain on the face of the earth."

The woman went and did as Elijah told her and they ate the food, she, himself and her son. The jar of meal was not spent nor the jug of oil emptied, just as the Lord had foretold through Elijah.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 4:2-5,7-8

Gospel Acclamation

Ph2:15-16

Alleluia, alleluia!

You will shine in the world like bright stars
because you are offering it the word of life.
Alleluia!

Gospel

Matthew 5:13-16

Your light must shine in the sight of men

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You are the salt of the earth. But if salt becomes tasteless, what can make it salty again? It is good for nothing, and can only be thrown out to be trampled underfoot by men.

'You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill-top cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp to put it under a tub; they put it on the lamp-stand where it shines for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine in the sight of men, so that, seeing your good works, they may give the praise to your Father in heaven.'

Fr Tim's Reflection

God has sent a famine on the land, and even the stream in the place where Elijah is in hiding dries up. So the Lord directs him to take refuge in Zarephath in Sidon, a coastal town well to the north of the land of Israel. There he finds a widow, also suffering from the consequences of the drought. Because of her willingness to share what she had with this holy man, the Lord makes sure that the whole household is provided for until rains come again.

Jesus cites this story in his teachings to show that God's favour rests not only with the chosen people of Israel, but extends to other nations as well. Every nation is to be held in esteem.

In our gospel today Jesus uses the examples of salt and light to convey the meaning of God's grace. We have to remember that salt was very valuable in the time of Jesus. It not only added flavour to food, but was able to preserve meat and fish indefinitely. It was so valuable and readily exchangeable that the Roman army was paid in salt. Hence the word "salary". So if we are the salt of the earth we are the ones who can help others to persevere in their faith and give flavour to their lives.

We are to be the light of the world. Again, like salt, this is an attribute that helps others in the faith. When we show good example and people see that, they can be drawn to God by the light our lives give off. We can imagine people in their houses gathered around the oil lamp in the evenings using the light for various activities. So too our lives can help others be productive and creative.

Yesterday, as we listened to the beatitudes, I asked who I would like to congratulate and into which category I might fall? We can ask similar questions about today's reading. How am I a help to others by shedding light on their lives? How am I salt for them, giving worth to their lives and helping them to persevere.

Finally, perhaps we can imagine the first people to hear this message from Jesus. Remember, for most people loving God was a matter of keeping rules and having discipline in their lives. Jesus' teaching was new and fresh in that it invited the listener to articulate for themselves the best parameters for developing their relationship with God. The same challenges apply to us also.

Tenth Week in Ordinary Time

Wednesday 10th June



First reading

1 Kings 18:20-39

Elijah vanquishes the priests of Baal

Ahab called all Israel together and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. Elijah stepped out in front of all the people. 'How long' he said 'do you mean to hobble first on one leg then on the other? If the Lord is God, follow him; if Baal, follow him.' But the people never said a word. Elijah then said to them, 'I, I alone, am left as a prophet of the Lord, while the prophets of Baal are four hundred and fifty. Let two bulls be given us; let them choose one for themselves, dismember it and lay it on the wood, but not set fire to it. I in my turn will prepare the other bull, but not set fire to it. You must call on the name of your god, and I shall call on the name of mine; the god who answers with fire, is God indeed.' The people all answered, 'Agreed!' Elijah then said to the prophets of Baal, 'Choose one bull and begin, for there are more of you. Call on the name of your god but light no fire.' They took the bull and prepared it, and from morning to midday they called on the name of Baal. 'O Baal, answer us!' they cried, but there was no voice, no answer, as they performed their hobbling dance round the altar they had made. Midday came, and Elijah mocked them. 'Call louder,' he said 'for he is a god: he is preoccupied or he is busy, or he has gone on a journey; perhaps he is asleep and will wake up.' So they shouted louder and gashed themselves, as their custom was, with swords and spears until the blood flowed down them. Midday passed, and they ranted on until the time the offering is presented; but there was no voice, no answer, no attention given to them.

Then Elijah said to all the people, 'Come closer to me', and all the people came closer to him. He repaired the altar of the Lord which had been broken down. Elijah took twelve stones, corresponding to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, 'Israel shall be your name', and built an altar in the name of the Lord. Round the altar he dug a trench of a size to hold two measures of seed.

He then arranged the wood, dismembered the bull, and laid it on the wood. Then he said, 'Fill four jars with water and pour it on the holocaust and on the wood'; this they did. He said, 'Do it a second time'; they did it a second time. He said, 'Do it a third time'; they did it a third time. The water flowed round the altar and the trench itself was full of water. At the time when the offering is presented, Elijah the prophet stepped forward. 'O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel,' he said 'let them know today that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, that I have done all these things at your command. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so that this people may know that you, the Lord, are God and are winning back their hearts.'

Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the holocaust and wood and licked up the water in the trench. When all the people saw this they fell on their faces. 'The Lord is God,' they cried, 'the Lord is God.'

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 15(16):1-2,4-5,8,11

Gospel Acclamation

Ps118:27

Alleluia, alleluia!

Make me grasp the way of your precepts,
and I will muse on your wonders.

Alleluia!

Gospel

Matthew 5:17-19

I have not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets but to complete them

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete them. I tell you solemnly, till heaven and earth disappear, not one dot, not one little stroke, shall disappear from the Law until its purpose is achieved. Therefore, the man who infringes even one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be considered the least in the kingdom of heaven; but the man who keeps them and teaches them will be considered great in the kingdom of heaven.'

Fr Tim's Reflection

The first reading today is one of the most exciting passages in the Old Testament. The famine is at its peak, but still the people don't turn to Yahweh. They are still worshiping Baal. In fact, Elijah finds that he is the last prophet of Yahweh, while there are 50 prophets of Baal.

Today we might call it a "sacrifice-off" - a holy duel to see which God is stronger. Elijah goes out of his way to make his own challenge as difficult as possible - dowsing his altar and offering with water. The prophets of Baal call on their God for hours, dancing and cutting themselves, and nothing happens. Elijah makes his humble petition and his offering is consumed in flames. The people are able to see the power of God and fall on their faces.

How would Elijah feel as victor after this showdown? I'm sure he must have felt proud, even vindicated that Yahweh had manifested his power in this way. However, as we shall see, Elijah's own education is far from complete. Yahweh still has more to teach him. First of all the rains come and the famine is over.

So far in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has been challenging his hearers to think for themselves. Can they congratulate themselves? Can they be a help to others? Perhaps some were taking this message too far, and abandoning the traditions of the old religion all together. So today Jesus puts his teaching into its proper relationship with the respect to the Law of Moses and the practice of the faith by the people of his day.

He has not come to abolish, but to complete. Later he will take issue with some of the regulations invented by the scribes and Pharisees, which, instead of drawing people to God, turned out to be a burden to them. For today, however, he reaffirms the continuity of his teaching with the revelation of God to his chosen people over many centuries.

Tenth Week in Ordinary Time

Thursday 11th June

St Barnabas

(Note: Corpus Christi is celebrated on Sunday)



First Reading

Acts 11: 21-26, 13: 1-3

He was a good man, filled with the Holy Spirit and with faith.

A great number believed and were converted to the Lord.

The church in Jerusalem heard about this and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. There he could see for himself that God had given grace, and this pleased him, and he urged them all to remain faithful to the Lord with heartfelt devotion; for he was a good man filled with the Holy Spirit and with faith. And a large number of people were won over to the Lord.

Barnabas then left for Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him he brought him to Antioch. As things turned out they were to live together in that church for a whole year, instructing a large number of people. It was at Antioch that the disciples were first called “Christians”. In the church at Antioch the following were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simon called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, Manean, who had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul. One day while they were offering worship to the Lord and keeping a fast, the Holy Spirit said, “I want Barnabas and Saul set apart for the work to which I have called them”. So it was that after fasting and prayer they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 97: 1-6

Alleluia

Mt 28: 18, 20

Alleluia, alleluia!
Go make disciples of all nations,
says the Lord;
I am with you always,
yes, to the end of time.
Alleluia

Gospel

Matthew 10: 7 – 13

You received without charge, give without charge.

Jesus said to the apostles, “As you go proclaim that the Kingdom of Heaven is close at hand. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out the devils. You received without charge, give without charge. Provide yourselves with no gold or silver, not even a few coppers for your purse, with no haversack for the journey or spare tunic or footwear or a staff, for the workman deserves his keep. “Whatever town or village you go into, ask for someone trustworthy and stay with him until you leave. As you enter his house, salute it, and if the house deserves it, let your peace descend upon it; if it does not, let your peace come back to you.”

Fr Tim’s reflection

In some countries today, the Thursday after Trinity Sunday, is celebrated as Corpus Christi – the feast where we thank God for the gift of Holy Communion. I remember being in Majorca once for this feast where it was celebrated with a magnificent procession – all the squares being decked out with flowers in intricate patterns. I’m sure many of you still remember the Corpus Christi processions where we followed the Blessed Sacrament and sung our hearts out.

However, in this country, this feast is celebrated on Sunday, so today we celebrate the feast of St Barnabas, the one who recruited Paul for the mission and accompanied him on his first missionary journey. The normal unfolding of the readings is interrupted as there are readings specific to this feast day.

In the Acts, which we listened to each day during the Easter Season, Paul (still Saul at this stage) is numbered as the last of the teachers in Antioch. Barnabas was the first and the leader of that community. Its possible that they knew each other before this, as they were both students of Gamaliel. They spend a whole year together, then the Holy Spirit sets them aside for the work of bringing the message to others who have not yet hear of Jesus. Barnabas was to play a key role in the Council of Jerusalem that admitted non-Jewish Christians to baptism without the need of circumcision first.

Eventually they part their ways and Barnabas becomes a missionary on his own. We believe he was martyred for the faith in Syria, though this is not recounted in the Acts. Amongst other things, Barnabas is the patron saint of other Christians who want to become Catholics.

Tenth Week in Ordinary Time

Friday 12th June



First reading

1 Kings 19:9,11-16

The Lord was not in the wind, or the earthquake, or the fire

When Elijah reached Horeb, the mountain of God, he went into the cave and spent the night in it. Then he was told, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord.' Then the Lord himself went by. There came a mighty wind, so strong it tore the mountains and shattered the rocks before the Lord. But the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind came an earthquake. But the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire. But the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire there came the sound of a gentle breeze. And when Elijah heard this, he covered his face with his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then a voice came to him, which said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' He replied, 'I am filled with jealous zeal for the Lord of Hosts, because the sons of Israel have deserted you, broken down your altars and put your prophets to the sword. I am the only one left and they want to kill me.'

'Go,' the Lord said, 'go back by the same way to the wilderness of Damascus. You are to go and anoint Hazael as king of Aram. You are to anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king of Israel, and to anoint Elisha son of Shaphat, of Abel Meholah, as prophet to succeed you.'

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 26(27):7-9,13-14

Gospel Acclamation

Jn10:27

Alleluia, alleluia!

The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice,
says the Lord,

I know them and they follow me.

Alleluia!

If your right eye should cause you to sin, tear it out

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You have learnt how it was said: *You must not commit adultery*. But I say this to you: if a man looks at a woman lustfully, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye should cause you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; for it will do you less harm to lose one part of you than to have your whole body thrown into hell. And if your right hand should cause you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; for it will do you less harm to lose one part of you than to have your whole body go to hell.

'It has also been said: *Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a writ of dismissal*. But I say this to you: everyone who divorces his wife, except for the case of fornication, makes her an adulteress; and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.'

Fr Tim's Reflection

Today God completes Elijah's education. The part of the story that we missed because of the feast yesterday had Elijah telling the King to prepare for rain. The drought was coming to an end.

Despite this Elijah falls foul of Jezebel, the king's wife, who was the chief promoter of the cult of Baal. She does not take defeat easily, and once more Elijah has to flee for his life. He finds himself on Horeb (usually identified with Mount Sinai), the mountain of God where Moses had received the 10 commandments before the Israelites were able to enter and take possession of the promised land.

Perhaps, after his experience with the prophets of Baal, he is expecting God to reveal his power once more. All sorts of dramatic phenomena pass in front of the cave where he takes refuge. Elijah discovers that God is not in the wind, or the earthquake, or the fire. Instead he finds God in the "gentle breeze", the calm that came after the storm had abated. Yes, God is a God of power and might, but he is also a God of peace and silence.

Perhaps during this lockdown we have experienced God in different ways, like Elijah looking out from his cave. Yet God is most powerfully present to us in the gentle breeze, the silence that fills our hearts with consolation. Being attentive in prayer is being attuned to the depth of God, his peace that resounds through our lives.

Having found God at this level, Elijah is given a simple mission. He is to anoint two kings and his successor Elisha. There are to be no more battles with the prophets of Baal, but by preparing a next generation, Elijah passes on his mantle (as we shall see, he does this quite literally).

The advice of Jesus in the gospel is not to be taken too literally. I'm sure he does not want us to mutilate those parts of our body that could possibly lead us to sin. The idea Jesus is promoting is an interior discipline. It is not enough simply to avoid committing sin, we have to want not to commit the sin in the first place.

The Law of Moses concentrated on actions – stealing, murder, adultery. Jesus of course does not want us to do any of these things, but his teaching goes deeper. We should not want to steal, we should not want to injure another, we should not want to give way to our lustful thoughts and desires.

This we can do by recognising temptations as they occur. We can evaluate them and deliberately decide to reject them. With this inner freedom, the desires that are the opposite of our base temptations can begin to make themselves heard. Instead of desiring what another has, I can wonder at how I can share what I have myself. Instead of desiring to do harm to another, my thoughts can be filled with how I can help the other to grow (remember the salt and the light from Tuesday). Instead of looking for pleasure for myself, I can develop healthy relationships with others.

After the struggle with temptation has been won, I can concentrate on how I can become a loving sister or brother the those that the Lord places in my path. Let us listen to that still gentle breeze as the Holy Spirit of God talks to each one of us.